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CONTENTS

	PAGE
FAITH IN GOD AND CHRIST, . .	3
THE MANY MANSIONS, ...	33
THE MANY MANSIONS (*continued*), .	57
THE WAY, ...	85
THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE, ...	111
THE RESURRECTION, ...	137

FAITH IN GOD AND CHRIST

A

FAITH IN GOD AND CHRIST

'Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me.'—JOHN xiv. 1.

WHEN these words were spoken the friends of our Lord had cause for trouble. He Himself just before had been troubled in spirit, and the agitation and distress must have excited their dismay. And though He had now recovered His calmness, He had been telling them things which filled them with sorrow and fear. All those mysterious words about His sufferings, which had often perplexed them, now took definite form and were to be at once fulfilled. One of their own number, so He said, was to betray Him. As the result of the be-

trayal, He was about to leave them; and whither He went they could not follow Him.

In His absence, whatever might be the unintelligible reason for it, they would naturally look to Peter as their centre and chief; for Peter was bold, energetic, and full of enthusiasm for their Master. But Peter had been warned that that very night he would three times deny Christ; and they had heard the warning. Their strongest man, their natural leader, was to be false to Christ at the very beginning of the miseries which menaced them. No wonder their hearts were troubled.

Our Lord was about to say many wonderful things to console them and to give them courage; but before saying them He charged them to believe in God—to believe also in Him. It would be to no purpose for Him to

speak while their faith in God and in Himself was prostrate. By a great moral effort they must recover the strength of their confidence in God—and in Himself; or the great and animating words that He was about to speak would give them no peace and would inspire no courage. '*Believe in God—believe also in Me*': to those who will not in the time of trouble summon all their force to recover the energy of their faith in God—and in Christ Who has revealed God,—Christ speaks in vain.

There are times in the history of most of us when these vigorous words contain the brief summary of our duty,—times when we are called to make a supreme effort to believe in God, to believe in Christ. Some severe trouble has given our moral nature a great shock, and for the time paralysed it. Or the moral difficulties of

our position have made it seem impossible to do the will of God, and we are ceasing to try to do it. Or silently, and gradually, and by influences we cannot trace, our hold of the great objects of Christian faith and hope has been lessened. All the things we once cared for most seem to be slipping from our grasp, and we can not hold them fast:—we do not much care to hold them fast. Or, suddenly, in a few days or weeks, the foundations of life have given way: the solid granite has become shifting sand: nothing is real to us beyond the narrow limits of this transient life; and there is nothing left to us but to dismiss our infinite hopes, and to forget that we ever had them. God and heaven are lost; only earth and man are left. I say that at such times these words of our Lord define our

duty: '*Believe in God—believe also in Me.*'

But I may be answered that at such times Faith is impossible, and that it is just because the Faith has gone that the trouble has come. It is the loss of Faith that constitutes the difficulty. You may say that there is nothing to be done but wait: perhaps Faith will return. Meantime you must be content to be faithful to plain duty, and must do as well as you can without the inspiration, the guidance, the strength that come from invisible and eternal things.

That was not our Lord's advice to His disciples; and if we follow this course in times of darkness and trouble, we are in danger of ruin. I say that it is not enough to wait, hoping that Faith will return. We have no right to expect that it will return, if we

do nothlng but wait. Nor is it enough to think with regret of what we have lost, or even to pray that we may recover it. We have a duty to discharge. We must obey Christ's words: '*Believe in God—believe also in Me.*'

But still you say, In the circumstances you suppose this is impossible. Faith is paralysed; the power to believe is destroyed. How do you know, if you will not exert it? And if it is impossible, He Who says '*Believe in God—believe also in Me*,' is the same Who said to the man in the Jewish synagogue whose hand was withered, 'Stretch forth thy hand.' 'And he stretched it forth, and his hand was restored.'

Faith in God—Faith in Christ: —I am not speaking of the formation of mere opinions; opinions may vary within quite indefinite

limits, while Faith remains:—Faith in God—Faith in Christ—is in its final form an act of the will: it is a moral act; it is not an emotion, an impression, the result of considerations which act upon a man from without; it is an act in which he exercises moral choice. To have Faith we must will to have it. I do not mean, of course, that there can be a true Faith apart from reasonable grounds of Faith. But these grounds may exist,—they may be apparent,—and yet Faith may be absent, because the temper and spirit of the man make him reluctant to exert his will, or because he misconceives the nature of the act. Men confound Faith and opinion: even in opinion a man's moral habits and tendencies count for a great deal; and you often predict what a man's opinions will be from what you

know of his character. But in the formation of opinion the will has no direct function, except to compel the intellect to investigate the facts by which opinion should be determined. In Faith the case is wholly different. When the facts which should command Faith are present and seen, Faith may be withheld. Faith is an act of the will; and if we suppose that we shall come to believe in God and in Christ as the result of external forces which compel belief, we shall not believe at all. And when Faith, resting on adequate grounds, is assaulted by doubt, the doubt must be met by a resolute decision.

You say that apart from your choice faith in God is wrecked. Well, take the case of the disciples. Their circumstances were desperate. Jesus of Nazareth,

Whom they had received as a prophet,—as more than a prophet,—was about to be crucified. That was the destruction of all their hopes. They had inherited from their ancestors conceptions of what the Messiah was to be to the Jewish nation and to the rest of mankind. These conceptions seemed to be sanctioned by the splendour of prophetic visions, and by the exultation of triumphant psalms. The Messiah was to be a powerful prince; was to win great victories; was to reign in wealth and glory over the Jewish race.

And they had—so it seemed to them—the strongest reason for believing that the great hope of their race was to be fulfilled in their Master. But now was it possible for them to resist the conviction that God had mocked them? Was not this tragic extinction

of their brilliant expectations a ground for abandoning all belief that the words of Prophets and of Psalmists would ever be fulfilled? God had raised infinite hopes, only to overwhelm them with misery and shame. Would it not have been natural for them to fling themselves into the dark gulfs of distress? Why should they trust in God any more? Why? Let them recall even now, by a vigorous moral effort, the long succession of centuries through which God had been faithful to their fathers; let them recall the words of ancient saints—words, the truth of which their own hearts confirmed,—concerning the righteousness of God, His compassions that fail not, His mercy that endureth for ever; let them recall the new discoveries of God which had come to them through Jesus of Nazareth,—through His

miracles of pity, through His teaching: let them make their choice. Under the strain of their present trouble, — trouble which was absolutely inexplicable, trouble which it seemed impossible to reconcile with the divine goodness and faithfulness, —let them make their choice. Lying behind them were reasons for immovable faith in God; lying around them were reasons for unbelief, for despair. It is for them to choose: will they yield to the despair, and surrender the reasons for Faith? Or will they hold fast to Faith and master the reasons for despair?

It is a trial which in other forms comes to many of us. On our election between the august and the dread alternatives depends the enduring quality of our moral life.

Or you may say that the grounds of your confidence in

Christ as Son of God and Saviour of mankind have been destroyed. Well, look at the circumstances of the disciples under another aspect. They might have come to the conclusion, not that God had failed them, but that Jesus of Nazareth was not what He had claimed to be. At this hour everything was against them. The judgment of the nation condemned Him: it is hard for men to hold on to their belief when all the currents of national opinion are sweeping them from it; and the friends of Christ knew that although there had been times when their countrymen seemed ready to acknowledge the claims of Jesus, He was now regarded with passionate resentment by the immense majority of the Jewish people. The judgment of those who on such questions appeared to have the best means

of forming a judgment condemned Him. The priests, the learned men who had spent their lives in the study of their sacred books, the religious men who fasted, prayed, and were most zealous for the honour of the law,—these, with rare exceptions, were vehement in rejecting Him. And how could He be the Christ? Was it possible that the Christ should be betrayed? Possible that He should be put to death? Was not the Christ to reign? Had not Jesus Himself spoken to them about His Kingdom? But how could He be King and yet be crucified? The King they hoped for was to judge the poor of the people, and to save the children of the needy, and to break in pieces the oppressor; He was to have dominion from sea to sea; His enemies were to lick the dust; all kings were

to fall down before Him; all nations were to serve Him. What could be plainer, what more certain, than that the claims of Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah had broken down? To these questions there seemed no reply. The difficulties they raised were for the time insoluble. Whatever may be the strength of the assaults on our own faith, the assaults on the faith of the disciples were fiercer. Have any of us been driven to unbelief by the bitter disappointment of the hopes with which we came to Christ? The disappointment of Christ's disciples was still more bitter. Have any of us found it hard to hold fast our faith because we are surrounded by unbelief? The unbelief which surrounded them was far more active and energetic. Have we been shaken by intellectual difficulties to which

we can give no answer? The difficulties which at this hour shook their belief were far more formidable and portentous. And He left them without any demonstration of His supernatural power: His miracles were over. But what did Christ say to them? '*Believe in God—believe also in Me.*' They were now, by an act of the will, to recall those words of His which had reached their hearts and consciences, and shed a new glory on human life and human destiny. They were to recall the impressions which had been made upon them by His way of speaking of the Father, by the depth of His trust and the fulness of His joy in God. They had seen for themselves that He was nearer to God than other men, that He stood on heights which neither prophet nor saint had ever

reached. They had found God in Him — and they knew it. Through His life had shone a supernatural glory which seemed to flow from eternal fountains of light. Now, indeed, darkness — dense darkness — had gathered; but they were to make their choice between the despair which would come from yielding to present disaster, and the faith which would come from recalling the glories which had been quenched. Will they forget all that Christ had been to them during the three years that they had spent with Him? Will they forget how He had lifted them into a new and larger life, given them an access to God such as they had never known in the Temple, exalted their conception of righteousness, kindling in them an ardour for perfection? Will they forget all this?—Or will

they hold it fast even now? They are called to a great, to a superhuman effort; but let them make their choice. It lies with them to make their election. There were reasons, decisive reasons, for trusting in Jesus as Christ: there were reasons, as it seemed, for refusing to trust. By an act of will they must determine whether they will yield to the reasons for Faith, or to the reasons for despair. We are sometimes called to make the same choice. God help us to make the nobler choice!

In the circumstances of the disciples there were other reasons for the loss of Faith; and these, too, have their analogies in our present experience. About these I must speak very briefly.

I suppose that one of the most common causes for the decay of religious earnestness and faith among ourselves is the discovery

in some of those whose religious life has attracted our interest, our affection, our admiration, grave defects of moral and spiritual character. The passing away of early illusions with regard to the sanctity of those who seemed to us exceptionally fervent and devout, is one of the severest tests of our loyalty to Christ. If any of those whom we have trusted and honoured are betrayed into gross sin, we receive a moral shock which sometimes almost destroys Faith. Everything seems to become unreal; we can trust nothing, believe nothing. For by one of the laws of our moral life, whatever destroys our confidence in our fellow-men tends to the destruction of our confidence in God. Such a shock must have come to the disciples when they heard from Christ of the treachery of Judas: their trust in each

other was part of their trust in Him. It was a large element in the joy and strength which they had received from Christ, that they had found in each other a great brotherly affection; and the loyalty of each of them to their Master confirmed the loyalty of the rest. But were they to lose faith in Christ because Judas was a traitor? No: they must collect and gather up the moral strength which his treachery had so roughly shaken; their brethren in the apostleship might be false, — but '*Believe in God — believe also in Me.*' We too, when we discover gross sin where we supposed that there was exceptional righteousness, great moral infirmity where we had thought there was the power of a divine life, should only send the roots of our faith deeper into the eternal righteousness and love of God.

Judas may be a traitor—but let us stand fast by our confidence in Christ.

The case is worse when the moral failure occurs in one from whom we have received religious guidance and support. The grace of God comes to all of us through human channels. When men inspire us with courage and with zeal, our weakness leans on their strength; when we falter, we receive firmness from their faith. If those who have been the leaders of our religious thought and life, fail, and fail conspicuously, we are in danger of despair. And Peter was the leader of the apostles, always first and most vehement in his loyalty to the Master; his courage had made them bold; his discovery of the true greatness of Christ had enlarged their conception of Christ's glory. They leant on him, and

followed him. And now, in the very agony of their trial, Peter was to prove false. He was to deny his Lord,—to deny Him thrice. Who of the rest could venture to be loyal? Christ lost to them, Peter lost, how could they stand firm? '*Believe in God—believe also in Me.*' We find strength in each other, but the real source of our strength is in the eternal power of the Divine Life. Prophet, preacher, saint may fail us: what remains? We know God, and Jesus Christ Whom He hath sent: we must trust the more firmly in the Divine righteousness and grace when the human supports of Faith are disloyal.

The principle, the spiritual law, on which I am insisting, is that Faith—again I say, I am not speaking of mere opinion—that Faith is largely an act of the will; and there is no Faith apart

from an act of the will. This principle is of great practical importance, not only to those whose faith is impaired by such causes as those of which I have been speaking, but to the still larger number of people who never exert themselves sufficiently to believe in God or Christ at all. That Faith is, as I have said, largely an act of volition, is apparent from the common experience of human life. You have a friend whom you have known long, and in whose moral integrity you have come to have a firm confidence, and for whom you feel a strong affection. You hear, you know, circumstances about him which appear to implicate him seriously in grave moral offences. People who are strangers to him, who bring to the case what you call an impartial judgment, are clear that he is guilty. There seems no

probable explanation of the hostile evidence. Taken by itself it is decisive; even when it is set by the side of many years of honourable conduct, he cannot be cleared. But you—if you are loyal to your friend—refuse to believe in his guilt; yes, you refuse: by an act of stubborn resistance you will not allow the proof of his guilt to influence you. Sometimes you may hardly be able to resist it; but you resist: you recall all your reasons for trusting him: you cannot explain the facts which seem to incriminate him, but you are sure that there is some explanation. You stand by your friend. That is an act of will. You do not merely see that there is a preponderance of reasons for trusting him; you trust him: and when he is cleared you are infinitely thankful that your trust did not give way.

There must of course be grounds for that resolute faith in him,—grounds which you may not be able to set out in a definite statement, but which to you who know him are as firm as the eternal hills. But even with grounds for faith like these, a man with infirm will may be mastered by the apparent hostile facts; the worth of your friendship, the fibre of your moral nature, are shown by the firm volition which holds fast to your friend in the presence of what to a stranger are decisive reasons for doubting him. And all Faith has this element of volition in it. Faith is a moral act, not an emotion, much less a mere intellectual impression.

Now the reason why large numbers of persons who constantly attend Christian worship never live what is really a Christian life, is this—they have never,

by a deliberate act, in which they have concentrated the whole energy of their conscience and their heart, put faith in Christ. They are passive, swept from point to point by every wind and wave of influence that breaks upon them. To-day they are carried by the strong impulse of some religious service to the very feet of Christ; to-morrow they will read some speculative article on the origin of the Four Gospels, and will be carried back into dreary regions of doubt. To-day they think the Gospel looks true; but they do not, because of its apparent truth—because in their very heart they know it is true,—elect to trust in God for all the love and inspiration and strength of which the Gospel assures them. To-morrow they will see many difficulties in the environment and vehicle of the Gospel, and their

judgment remains in suspense. They think—they really believe—that some day the truth of the Gospel will blaze upon them in such glory as to destroy all doubt; they believe that some strong and mysterious and irresistible tide of religious influence will carry them into regions of thought and experience in which the great objects of Faith will appear before them without any mist or cloud. But the time has not come yet.

My friends, you have no right to expect that it will ever come, until by your own act you have made the eternal Kingdom of Christ your own. What you want is the moral energy to make the supreme choice. Read the Four Gospels: is the substance of the story to be believed or not? Against all speculative difficulties can you elect to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son

of God, and Saviour of men, the Lord of your life, the source of moral and spiritual strength, the ideal of your perfection? Believe in the God of Whom Christ speaks. Believe in Christ Himself. Believe as you believe in a friend in whose integrity strangers have lost confidence, but of whose innocence of the charge brought against him you are assured. Believe in God—as the disciples were called to believe in Him when Christ was about to be betrayed and Peter to deny.

THE MANY MANSIONS

THE MANY MANSIONS

'In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.'—JOHN xiv. 2, 3.

IT would not be easy to find in human language words simpler than these. Not only are the separate words simple; they are simple when they are taken together. And the forms of thought which they express are simple. They speak of the great home of God,—a home with ample room for all His children; of Christ going to prepare a place for us; of His coming again to receive us unto Himself, that where He is, there may we be also. What can be simpler? Taken as they

stand, the words convey a meaning—a true and wonderful meaning—to a child—to an unlettered peasant,—a meaning full of consolation in times of sorrow, and of joy in times when the heart is free for gladness in God and in the hope of immortal blessedness. It is enough for all of us to know that we are going to God's home, that Christ has gone to prepare a place for us there, that we shall be with Him for ever.

But it is one of the characteristics of our Lord's teaching that though it is within the reach of every man, it is beyond the reach of every man. The truths which are contained in these words are stated in forms which are intelligible to those who are incapable of speculative thought; but let a man of the most vigorous and adventurous intellect attempt to explore them, and I think he will

find that year after year they will become more and more wonderful, and that they will always transcend the limits of his thought. The words of Christ have a meaning which can never be exhausted. He Himself had descended from the heights of God to the lowliest human condition; but through His lowly human life those who had eyes to see discovered a divine glory. His words were like Himself, lowly and simple, but through the lowliest and simplest of them there gleams the light of a diviner world than this. What these words mean we all know; explanation is unnecessary: what they mean none of us know; for as soon as we try to explain them we discover that explanation is impossible. We can travel a little way into the provinces of truth which they reveal, but our strength fails,

and we can only sit down and wonder at the glory which lies beyond us.

'*My Father's house*': that means the Home of God. Has God a home, then? Is there any world among the stars where He is more truly present than in the other regions of His universe? Who can tell? That path brings us suddenly to the edge of the cliff, and we can go no farther. At our feet there lies an awful precipice, and we look down on clouds which conceal its depth. We must turn back and try another line of discovery. Whether God has a home or not—whether He is more truly in one place than another—is a question to which there may be answers, and I think there are; but the way to them is too uncertain and perilous for us to attempt at present. About ourselves, however, we can

speak more confidently. If *we* are to live, we must live somewhere; where we live will be our home; and the home of the children of God is described by Christ as His Father's house.

And although God Himself is everywhere, the manifestations of God vary in intensity and in glory. To those who have found God there is a manifestation of Him in the rocks and glaciers of the Alps; there is a higher manifestation of Him in the pines and in the blue gentians that live near the desolation of eternal snow; a higher manifestation still in the intellectual life of man; and a still higher manifestation in the moral life of man—in which, however defaced, we can recognise the very image of God; and again, there is a higher manifestation of Him in the compassion and purity and righteousness of saints. God

is everywhere, but He has revealed His presence, His power, and His character variously,—here in lower forms, there in higher. He reveals Himself more or less fully to us in more direct ways. Sometimes we have only a faint consciousness that He is near; sometimes the consciousness is lost altogether, and even saints have to live on the memory of past revelations and in the strength of a faith which is assured that He never forsakes those who trust in Him; sometimes the consciousness of His presence is so vivid that God alone seems real and the visible universe becomes a transparent and transitory medium through which we see the Divine glory. To few men, I imagine, is this permanent vision of God granted in this life; but to many men He has seemed more real in their great hours

than either the earth or the stars. Instead of searching through the Creation to find a Creator, their problem has been—as was said of an American thinker not long ago—'Given the Creator, to find the Creation.'

The manifestations of God vary, I say, in different places; they vary in the same place and to the same person at different times. In the Home of God of which Christ speaks we shall all find God. There His personal life will be revealed to us, as our personal life is revealed to those who live with us under the same roof. We shall find Him always; find Him without painful and wearisome search; we shall never lose Him. He lives there, and we shall live with Him.

In what ways God will make His presence perceived and felt by us we cannot tell. But to

those of us whose chief trouble it is that our vision of God is continually clouded;—that our sense of His presence is dull and vague at the best, and is often lost altogether;—that the very loveliness and grandeur of nature which in our highest moods reveal God, often fill us with such delight in their own beauty and majesty that they come between God and us;—that we are so wanting in love for other men and in spiritual perception that we fasten upon what is most imperfect in them, are vexed by it, irritated by it, repelled by it, instead of seeing in them possibilities of an infinite perfection, the reflection of the Divine image;—that even in Christ, Who is God manifest in the flesh, we often see the flesh and not God;—to those of us, I say, whose chief trouble it is that we seem to be living in a world

where everything conceals God from us, it is a hope which kindles the heart to rapture, that the time is coming when we shall live in a world where everything will reveal Him. And this is the hope that is created by the words of Christ about His Father's house.

'*My Father's house*': It is God's Home of which He is speaking. Where Christ the Son of God is, we are to be also. God therefore will not only reveal Himself to us in wonderful ways, and give us a constant sense of His presence with us,—He will reveal Himself as our Father.

We can imagine many forms of Divine revelation that would give us no permanent delight, and that would contribute very little to the development of the higher forms of moral and spiritual perfection. It is possible to become weary of the grandeur and the

vastness of some of the aspects of physical nature,—weary of the ocean,—weary of the immensities of the starry heavens,—weary of the roar and rush of the waters of Niagara,—weary of the awful loneliness and desolation of the Matterhorn. They reveal God—but they do not reveal those elements of His life which are nearest to ourselves, which solicit trust, which create love, and which inspire delight. At *home* God will reveal Himself in other ways. There may be within sight the most majestic achievements of His power and wisdom; we may be environed with the most gracious illustrations of His delight in beauty; but we shall know Him as we have never known Him before—as our Father. He will be righteous,—but He will lay aside something of the awfulness of His righteousness; in-

finitely wise and strong,—but His wisdom and strength will appear, not in forms to oppress and confound us, but in forms to excite our wonder and delight. We shall be very near to Him,—near as the children of a king to their father when he has laid aside for a time the pomp and cares of state, and is at once finding and giving joy among those who are dearest to him.

We are to live where Christ lives, Who is still the Son of man as well as the Son of God. His home is to be ours; we are to share its peace as well as its splendour, its eternal glory and happiness as well as its dignity. As the brothers and sisters of Christ we are to share all His life,—the environments of it, its activities, its honours, as well as its moral and spiritual perfection. His joy in the Father and His

free access to Him are to be ours.

'*In my Father's house there are many mansions*': Christ means that there is room enough there for all His disciples as well as for Himself,—a place for those who had erred and gone astray as well as for those who have never sinned. His death was to be no final separation from them. He was going to God; and if it had not been possible for them to go too, He would have told them.

It has been suggested that by the '*many mansions*' our Lord intends to suggest that among the blessed there are varieties of function and varieties of honour. That this is true appears from other parts of His teaching; and we do well to remember that our rank and the measure of our power and blessedness in the great life to come depend largely

upon the fidelity with which we discharge our earthly duties. Yes—we shall learn by and by that the very humblest tasks faithfully performed under the power of love for God and man have made us more truly the children of our Father in heaven, and give us a higher place in His eternal home. We shall then learn that whatever honest endeavour we have made in fellowship with the spirit of Christ to lessen the miseries of mankind, to cheer their sadness, to recover them from sin, has drawn us nearer to Christ, has raised us in the spiritual order, and has therefore prepared us to share more of Christ's greatness. This is a truth, but I do not think that Christ means to teach it in this place. Here He is saying that there is room for all His children in the House of His Father: how their

places will be determined He teaches elsewhere.

A more subtle and interesting suggestion has been made by Dr. Westcott. The word '*mansions*' in our English version was suggested in this place by the rendering of the Latin Vulgate. The 'mansions' of the Latin were resting-places, and especially the 'stations' on a great road where travellers found refreshment; and this Dr. Westcott thinks is the true meaning of the Greek word here, so that the contrasted notions of repose and progress are contained in this vision of the future. That, I say, is a subtle and interesting suggestion, and no doubt the true conception of the eternal future includes the idea of perpetual development,—the movement of the intellect into new regions of truth, the ascent of the moral life

to loftier heights of righteousness, the increase of the fervour of love for God and for all those who will share our blessedness in Him, the discovery from age to age of new and glorious forms of moral and spiritual life that will attract our affection and fill us with delight, the enlargement—the perpetual enlargement—of all those powers which find their exercise in the service of God and of those whom He has created. Rest and progress will doubtless be united in the perfect life.

But though I always hesitate to differ from Dr. Westcott, on a question of this kind, this thought does not seem to have been in Christ's mind here. He is speaking of one great Home, in which there is room enough for a great household to live; and to import into the words the idea of a transitory resting-place on the great

roads of the Roman world is to break up the conception under which our Lord has chosen to illustrate our future life. The only other place, by the way, in the New Testament, in which the word here translated 'mansions' occurs is in the 23rd verse of this chapter: 'If a man love Me, he will keep My word: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make our *abode* with him.' There too I venture to think that our Lord's

And here this word '*mansions*' is not to be taken in the sense the word from which it is derived often bears in Latin. It is a place which we reach, and where we rest after a journey; but it is our eternal home; and what Christ means is that since there are many mansions there is room enough for us all.

The rest of this passage I will not now attempt to illustrate. For I wish to remind you, and to remind you very seriously, that the gospel is 'the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth,' but that for a complete salvation we must receive a complete gospel. There are times in the history of the Church when the inspiration of the supreme hope is necessary for the vigour as well as for the joy of the Christian life, for righteousness and duty as well as for

happiness; and I think we are passing through such a time now. It seems to me as if too many of us Christian people were very much in the condition of the disciples during the dreary interval between the Crucifixion and those days of triumph when they discovered that He had risen from the dead and ascended to the Father, and that they in their turn were to follow Him to glory. We have the Sermon on the Mount; and so had they. We have the Parable of the Prodigal Son; and so had they during these hours of despondency and despair. We have the memory of His perfect devotion to God and to man; so had they. We have the memory of all those works of mercy in which He showed His compassion for human misery; and so had they. But these were not enough to save them from despair.

Their strength was paralysed, their courage lost, their faith shaken. 'We hoped it was He that should redeem Israel'—that was their temper, and something like it is ours. A church that knows nothing more of Christ than what lies between His birth and crucifixion will be a church without any passionate zeal in it, without any daring, without any decision, without any power to subdue the evil in itself, and without any power to subdue the evil that is in the world. We know in what mood the disciples were when they had no thought save of that which lay between His birth and His crucifixion. What made the change between the moral feebleness of those panic-stricken disciples during the hours when Jesus was supposed to be lying in the grave, and the glorious courage and audacity of

Pentecost and of the victorious years that followed it? Why, they had discovered that Christ's death was not the end of His work, nor was death to be the end of theirs. They had not lost Him when He was crucified and buried in Joseph's sepulchre. The resurrection had given Him back to them with new and more glorious powers, in a fellowship more intimate than they had ever known before; and it had given them assurance of the truth of these great words: '*In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.*'

Let us by the energy of a loyal faith endeavour to make this discovery ours. Life for a great many of us is grey and dim. Let the glory of eternity break through the clouds. We are wanting, many of us — how many! — in

decision, in earnestness, in elastic energy: let us find vigour where a thousand saints have found it —at the fountain of immortal strength. Life is full of disappointments; the horizons narrow with the advancing years: let the sadness sometimes forget itself in the anticipation of eternal joy, and the poverty in the anticipation of eternal wealth. The hopes that look for fulfilment within these mortal years often fail, but the great hope is beyond the reach of vicissitude and peril; and while we are learning with sorrow the narrowing limits of our mortal strength, let us exult in the ages which are to bring a perpetual expansion to all our powers and to all our joys. Half a gospel will never give any man the whole of the Christian redemption. In the gospel of Christ, life and immortality have

been brought to light, and a universal spirit that should distinguish the children of God,—a magnanimous superiority to the vicissitudes of this earthly life, the courage to attempt great duties and the fortitude to bear without complaint great sorrows: these come not merely from the pathetic memories of the past, from the incarnation of Christ, from His sorrows, from His death, but from the endless ages of righteousness, of wisdom, of peace, of joy, and of glory, that Christ has promised us in the home of God.

THE MANY MANSIONS

(continued)

THE MANY MANSIONS

(*continued*)

'In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.'—JOHN xiv. 2, 3.

THESE words contain our Lord's reply to two questions which had just been asked by the Apostle Peter. Our Lord had been telling His disciples that the time had come for Him to leave them. Peter asked Him, 'Whither goest Thou?' and when our Lord answered, 'Whither I go, thou canst not follow Me now; but thou shalt follow afterwards,' Peter asked a second question: 'Why cannot I follow Thee even now? I will lay down my life for Thee.' 'Wilt thou lay down thy life for

me?' replied our Lord: 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.' It looked as if Peter's vehement expression of devotion, contrasted with his tragic fall which was to happen that very night, had made our Lord forget his questions, but now He answers them: '*In My Father's house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you.*' Now they knew whither He was going, and why they could not follow Him at once. He was going to the Home of God, and going to prepare a place for them; they must wait till the place was prepared, and then they were to follow Him. No—not to follow Him; they would not have to travel alone and find their way to the house of God for themselves. '*I come again*,' He said, '*and will receive you unto Myself; that*

where I am, there ye may be also.'

As I have already said, the words are so simple that a child or an unlettered peasant might understand them. Christ has gone to prepare a place for us in the house of His Father: what more need we know? This is enough to give us the exhilarating hope and joy which are necessary for righteousness; this is enough to invigorate the faith which is agitated by the mysteries that environ us; this is enough to sustain the fortitude which is likely to give way under the recurring shocks of earthly trouble.

In studying these words we have tried to discover what Christ reveals of the conditions of our future life when He speaks of His '*Father's house*,' and of the '*many mansions*.' And now I propose to inquire what He

means by saying that He was going to leave His disciples that He might '*prepare a place*' in His Father's house for them and for us. Now when that question is once raised we are in the presence of some of the most august truths of the Christian revelation. But first, let me remind you that the words are a striking illustration of the Divine greatness of Christ. That a saint or a prophet when about to die, should say to his friends, 'I am going to the home of God, and in the home of God you too may find a place,'—this would not startle us. It is a glorious achievement, no doubt, for any man standing near to the awful mystery of death to be able, with perfect calmness and absolute certainty, to speak of an endless life and to anticipate the joy of meeting in the Divine glory those whom he has loved on earth;

this victory of faith, however, is possible to us all. Christ said something infinitely more than this: 'I go to the home of God, *that I may prepare a place for you.*' Who is He—what is He—that He assumes the power to do a work like this? He separates Himself from all the rest of the human race. He is man; but this implies that He is infinitely more than man. The conception of the Divine greatness of our Lord was gradually built up, as separate declarations of this kind came to be fully mastered by the thought of the Christian Church. He said that He had come to give life to the world; to save the world; that He died that the sins of the world might be forgiven; that He would raise the dead; that He would return in glory to give to every man according to his deeds; that from His lips the

blessed would receive their welcome into everlasting life, and those who had rejected His infinite love would receive their condemnation to eternal death. And here He declares that we, the children of God, are to find that our place in our Father's house has been prepared for us by Him.

Now I care comparatively little for any formal theory of our Lord's Divinity,—though I think that the intellect has its rights, and will imperiously demand a satisfactory definition of His relations to the Eternal Father. What I chiefly care for is that in our conception of Christ we should include all His representations of Himself. For myself I believe in the Nicene Creed; but if the Nicene Creed perplexes you, leave it alone till the truth of it becomes self-evident. Meanwhile believe what Christ said

about the glory He had with the Father before the foundation of the world, and about the authority which the Father has given Him over all flesh; believe what He said about His being the root of all human righteousness, so that separated from Him His disciples were like withered branches of a tree, fit only for burning; believe what He said about His being the Bread that came down from heaven to give life to the world; believe what He said about the connection of His death with the remission of the sins of all men, about His power to lay down His life and take it again, about the hour when all that are in their graves are to hear His voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done ill to the resurrection of judgment; believe

what He said about His presence with us here to the end of time, and about His preparing a place for us in His Father's house; believe all this,—let Him have the trust, the love, the obedience, the reverence which are the only true signs of belief,—and whether you are satisfied that the theologians and Councils of the Church have given a true account of Who and What He is, or whether you are dissatisfied with all their definitions of the nature and glory of Christ, I regard as of secondary importance. On the other hand, you may formally acknowledge, and you may recite every Sunday, that He is 'The only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father,'—you may, I say, formally

acknowledge that He is Divine, and yet if your mind and your heart and your imagination are not under the power of these great manifestations of His divinity of which I have just been speaking,—if you habitually think of Him only as a Jewish prophet, of wonderful wisdom and wonderful sanctity,—if your thoughts of Christ practically end with His crucifixion and burial, your faith in Him will have no vigour, your joy no fervour or passion, and you will know very little of the blessedness of the Christian redemption.

But these words remain unexplained when we say simply that they imply His Divine greatness. What does He mean by 'preparing a place for us'? Why could not the Father do it alone? Why must He do it? How has He done it? Put into the form

of an abstract proposition, and illustrated by other passages in our Lord's teaching, these words affirm that the death of Christ, His resurrection, and His return to glory, were necessary if we were to live a perfect and blessed and endless life in God. Now that is not nearly so beautiful, not nearly so pathetic, as the pictorial language of Christ Himself. It is not so universally intelligible. The imagination can express many great truths much more vividly and completely than the logical understanding; but the logical understanding must work with its own instruments and by its own methods; and, translated into the terms of the understanding, these words of Christ about 'going to prepare a place for us' seem, I say, to take this form:—His death, resurrection, and ascension to glory,

were necessary if we were to live a perfect and blessed and endless life in God. We could have no place in our Father's house apart from the sufferings of Christ and His recovery of His eternal power and glory.

But why were these necessary? How did they render the blessed life possible to us?

We must remember Who Christ is. He is the Son of God; and as the Son of God, His relations to the human race, who were created to be the children of God, are very intimate and very wonderful. You know the Pantheistic theory of the universe,—that we all live in God, that God is the only real being, and that we are but leaves on the eternal tree of His infinite life, with no separate, no independent personality. That is but a portion of a truth, or a defective

statement of a truth, which is revealed in the Christian Gospel. We are all created — you and I —to share the life of the Eternal Son of God, Who by the Divine purpose and will is the root of the higher life of every man. We are strong for righteousness only as we share His strength, and the fountains of our perfection are in Him, not in ourselves. According to the Divine order there lies beneath the very self of every man another and a Divine self. Within the will of every man, according to the Divine order, there acts another and a Divine will. We were created in Christ, and there is no form of righteousness possible to us that is not found in Christ and derived from Him. He is the glorious ideal of perfection to which through endless ages we are continually to approach, but which we can

never reach; and to whatever heights of moral glory we may attain, we shall always find that they are transcended in Him.

Now it takes time to make that conception of Christ and of our relations to Him quite familiar to our thought, and to give it its true place. It is all contained in what He said about the Vine and the branches; it is illustrated in many other parts of His teaching, which in form are perfectly simple; but it is only by meditation and prayer, and by the habit of relying on Christ as the real root of our life, that the grandeur of the truth becomes real to us, and that we discover what light it sheds on whole realms of mystery. Christ, I say, is the ideal of human life and of human righteousness. All human righteousness and perfection are contained in Him and derived from

Him. If you grasp that firmly, you will begin to see how His death and resurrection and ascension to glory were necessary if we were to have a place in the Home of God.

Having thought of Him, for a moment let us think of ourselves. The righteousness of a sinful race —we have all erred and strayed from God's ways like lost sheep —the righteousness of a sinful race must include an adequate sense of the awful evil of its sin. It must include a submission,—complete, uncomplaining, inspired with an unfaltering trust in the Divine love,—to the worst sufferings which in the Divine order have come upon the race as the result of sin. If Christ is the root of our righteousness, *He* must have this sense of the evil of our sin, and *He* must make this submission to the

sufferings which are the result of sin. Now before He hung on the cross, He in the heights of His eternal glory had felt how evil a thing sin is; but before He hung on the cross, no human heart had ever felt all the evil of human sin; and it was necessary that the evil of human sin should be felt by Him Who is the root of human perfection. We could never feel it, even imperfectly, unless it was perfectly felt by Him. He had felt it before His incarnation, — for He was even then the root of the righteousness of the race, and therefore the root of its penitence. But when He became man He felt it in new forms, and the human anguish which came upon Him from the discovery of moral evil broke His heart. All the crimes of the race, —its ambition and tyranny, its cruelty, violence, brutality, and

lust, its meanness and treachery, its crimes of deliberation and its crimes of fury and passion, the crimes of misery as well as the crimes of wealth, the crimes of the oppressor and the crimes of the oppressed, the crimes of civilisation and the crimes of barbarism, — the sin of the world, Christ felt it all; it came home to Him—the sin of the race that He had created, that He loved, that was akin to Him, that was destined to share His own life; He felt it, and was filled with agony by it. He saw the guilt of the race, and with a fortitude which came from an immeasurable love for the race that had sinned, He—the Creator of the race, its Head, its root — submitted to the physical sufferings, the spiritual loneliness and desolation, the death, which are the just and necessary consequences

of breaking away from the Divine order. We, His brethren, were 'sharers in flesh and blood,' and therefore 'He also Himself in like manner partook of the same.'[1] They had brought upon themselves intolerable calamities, and He would not separate Himself from them in their worst estate. Acknowledging from His very heart that the anguish and misery and death which had come upon men were the just consequences of the universal moral confusion, He lost the sense of the Father's presence, and died a horrible death on the cross.

Before we could pass out of this troubled world into the peace and blessedness of our Father's Home, it was fitting that the sin which had been the origin of the trouble should be gathered up into one supreme confession by

[1] Hebrews ii. 14.

Him Who alone had a right to speak for the race, and that He should acknowledge for us—that we might acknowledge with Him —the supreme righteousness of the Divine order. And so His death was necessary '*to prepare a place*' for us in the Home of God.

But His resurrection and ascension were also necessary. Have you never felt the melancholy contrast between those conceptions of our relations to God which sometimes fill our imagination with splendour,—conceptions which are sanctioned by the authority of Christ Himself, —and the limitations and infirmities of our actual life? Who are we, and what are our powers, that we should claim this kinship to the infinite and eternal God? Where is the justification even in our intellectual and moral life for

the great title we have learned to appropriate? What signs are there that we are the sons of the Most High? And our physical organisation is as necessary as our intellectual and moral life to the integrity of human nature. We should not be men unless in us the spiritual and the material met,—unless we had a vision for the loveliness and grace and grandeur of the material universe, an ear for its music and its storms,—unless the fragrance of the flowers brought gladness,—and unless the summer's warmth and the fresh winds of the mountains and the sea were a delight. But in our physical organisation, even more than in our intellectual life, there are elements which seem to make it a mockery for us to call the Eternal God our Father. How brief are our years! How soon

our strength is spent! The flesh weighs heavily on the spirit. The brain wearies, and our powers of thought fail; the fires of imagination are quenched, and the records of memory vanish. The currents of the blood are troubled; vision is darkened, hearing dulled, and all the wonderful faculties of the senses decay. How can we be called the children of God? How can we dwell in His blessed Home? Are there any other conditions of life possible to us than these under which we are living now? Can we be men and yet have a strength that no labour or joy shall exhaust,—powers that shall expand through the growing years, and never reach the limit of their capacity? Can we remain ourselves and yet be as different from what we are as is the wheat, brown and gold in the autumn

sun, from the seed that appeared to be rotting in the ground in the early spring?

Christ's resurrection and ascension answer these questions. In Him human nature has sprung from the dust, has unfolded new and unexpected powers, has risen to heights that are inaccessible as yet even to the keenest vision of thought; and that triumphant, ever-expanding life of His we are to share. In the power of His resurrection we are able to rise from the dead; and what His human nature has become, ours is some day to be. All that we have has come from Him; and He having assumed our humanity, it was necessary that humanity in Him should be transfigured and glorified before transfiguration and glory were possible to us. By His resurrection and ascension He has rendered it possible for

you and me to bear the vision of the eternal splendours, and to sustain without fainting the eternal weight of glory.

He has gone to prepare a place for us in the house of His Father, and He says—'*I come again, and receive you unto Myself.*' It is an immense gain that our Revised Version has drawn us into closer harmony with our Lord's words. In this place the passage used to read—'I *will* come again, and receive you unto Myself.' But that is not what Christ said; the Revisers are more accurate: '*I come again, and receive you unto Myself.*' The coming is not thrown into a remote and dim future. It is represented as immediate, and, as I think, continuous. '*I come again,*'—I return as soon as I leave you,—I continue to come; My permanent relation to you will be a perpetual approach to

you. Christ—the glorified Christ—is always in the Church; and at last He will draw us completely to Himself, and we shall find ourselves in the Father's house. The enduring approach of Christ to the earthly Church is what our Lord represents when He says '*I come*,' and our elevation to the glory in which He dwells is represented by His declaration that He will receive us '*unto Himself*': '*that where I am, ye may be also.*'

And a test—surely one of the tests, one of the best tests—of the truth and reality and vigour of our Christian life lies in this,—that when we anticipate the great life to come, however far speculation may endeavour to trace its course in the province of that mysterious land, we return to this thought, which satisfies completely all the deepest and best desires of our hearts,—that where Christ is, we

are to be also. But there is a personal delight in these words of Christ's: His joy would be incomplete if we were not with Him in the Father's house. It would diminish our gladness, our anticipation of supreme bliss, if we did not know that our presence with Him would heighten His own happiness. He is not so absorbed in the splendours of His Eternal Throne, nor in the great tasks which belong to Him as the Lord of the heaven and the earth, as to be indifferent to the affection that binds Him to us and to God. Nor is He so absorbed even in the blessedness of His eternal fellowship with the Father. If on the one side of His nature He is eternally one with God, on the other side of His nature He is eternally one with us; and fellowship with us in the perfection of our righteous-

ness and the perfection of our blessedness, is as necessary to the heavenly glory of Christ as His fellowship with the Father Himself. The joy that was set before Him when He endured the Cross, despising the shame, was this,—that He might redeem you and me from sin; and knowing as only He knows the blessedness of living in the eternal love of God, He wanted us in our measure to know that blessedness likewise. To achieve this for us, He stooped from the heights of His glory and became man, was tempted and has died, and through age after age of weary conflict with the sin of the world He continues to strive for this great end. And as in the generations gone by His love has pleaded with the hearts and with the consciences of men, as He has asked men to believe Him when He says they are dear

to His heart and to God's heart, and that only by accepting the Divine love and righteousness is it possible for them to attain the eternal joy, so to us in our time come the same entreaties; you and I are asked by Him to believe that His joy will be heightened and perfected by the vision of our righteousness and of our blessedness. *Where He is, we are to be also.*

THE WAY

THE WAY

'And whither I go, ye know the way.'
JOHN xiv. 4.

OUR LORD'S great words about the many mansions in His Father's house, and about the place that He was going to prepare for them, were likely to suggest many questions to His disciples. They suggest many questions to us. Where is this Home of God? In one of the stars we shall see to-night if the sky is clear? Or are the many mansions in many worlds, each with its own splendour? Or is the Home of God and of His children invisible to mortal eyes? What will be the conditions of human life when God has gathered us all to Him-

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ardent than ours? Will those of us whose intellectual capacity is narrow rely then, as now, on those of ampler knowledge and wider faculties? Will the human race be separated from other orders of created life? or shall we live with those whom we describe as Angels and Archangels and all the hosts of glorious beings who for ages have dwelt in God? Where is our home? What kind of a home will it be?

Such questions as these were likely to be suggested by our Lord's words; and the questions were of such interest, and the time the disciples had for asking them was passing away so quickly, that it would not have been surprising if they had pressed our Lord to answer them.

Some of these questions were evidently in their thoughts; but there was a nearer and more

urgent subject on which our Lord wanted to speak. That the disciples—that we ourselves—should think, should speculate about the great life to come, is natural. It is surprising that we do not think more about it. We should be very much the better for thinking more about it. One of the most charming pictures, I think, in the story of the lives of saintly men is that which occurs in the life of Richard Baxter, in which he describes himself as sitting during the twilight when the sun was setting, before the candles were brought in, and thinking about the Saints' everlasting rest. You know the great, the wonderful delight that came from those holy thoughts of his; and if we had such thoughts they would console and strengthen us, they would enlarge and ennoble all our conceptions of our life and the ends

of life, and they would make all the revelations of the Divine love and righteousness more real to us.

And yet, as I have said, there was a nearer and more urgent subject on which our Lord wanted to speak. It is not safe to think so much about our eternal home as to forget the way to it. Between the present and the future the relations are vital. If we are to live a perfect and blessed life in the next world, there is a way, a path, in which we must walk to reach it: our Lord Himself says: '*Whither I go, ye know the way*,' and the emphasis of the sentence is on the word 'I.' He lived a life very unlike the life of other men, distinguished from it by strong and striking characteristics which could not be overlooked or mistaken. The disciples to whom He was speaking had been His

friends for three years; they knew what kind of a man He was, and the life He had led, and how unlike He was to other men. '*Whither I go, ye know the way.*'

This is one of our Lord's simplest sayings: it is also one of the most profound. It covers some of the deepest questions concerning the life we hope for. It affirms the continuity of this life and of the next. His own manner of living in this world was *the way* to that Home of the Father to which He was going in the next. He had not only revealed the blessedness of the unseen and eternal world; He had also revealed the kind of life men must lead in order to achieve it. '*Whither I go, ye know the way.*'

To enumerate all the characteristics of our Lord's life is impossible; but some of its more remarkable elements are obvious.

His *way* of life—which was the way to the eternal Home of God, —was distinguished by the place that God had in it. He was always under the control of God's presence. He was greater than the Temple; for God was present in His life in a far more glorious manner than that in which God was present in the Holy of Holies. He had never to seek God; for He lived with God. He prayed: there were necessary for Him— and this is very instructive for us —there were necessary for Him long stretches of time in which He separated Himself from His work and His friends, that He might speak to the Father. He spent whole nights in prayer. God ruled and inspired His whole life. He lived in God, and God in Him. '*Whither I go, ye know the way.*' That is the life that leads to the Home of God.

The will of God was always, not only His rule of conduct, but the spring, the impulse, and the initial force from which His conduct came. He did nothing of Himself. '*Whither I go, ye know the way.*' That is the life that leads to the Home of God. In a true sense He was detached from the world. Nothing is clearer than that He did not lay up for Himself treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth consume, and where thieves break through and steal. He was not anxious for His life, what He should eat; nor yet for His body, what He should put on. He sought first for God's kingdom, and for God's righteousness, and trusted to God to give Him food, clothing, and shelter. God gave Him what He knew He wanted. It is equally clear that earthly glory, earthly rank, had no fasci-

nation for Him, nor earthly power. He merely wanted to do God's will, and to use all His strength in doing it. '*Whither I go, ye know the way.*' That is the life that leads to the Home of God.

But though detached from the world, in the sense that for Him it was of secondary importance whether the pleasant things of the world came to Him or not, He had the most affectionate interest in the lives of other men, and the most affectionate pity for all kinds of human want and misery. As to what He Himself should eat He was not anxious; but He wrought a miracle to feed the hungry. No physical agony of His own could turn Him aside from His work; but He gave strength to the paralysed, subdued the fires of fever, and spent a great part of His time in lessening the tem-

poral miseries and contributing to the temporal happiness of all kinds of men. '*Whither I go, ye know the way.*' That is the life that leads to the Home of God.

His own blessedness was in the righteousness and love of God, and His blessedness was perfect; but how deeply, how intensely He loved those to whom this blessedness was unknown! Perfectly righteous Himself, how His heart clung to the very worst of sinners! He came to seek and to save God's lost children, and He found them and saved them. '*Whither I go, ye know the way.*' That is the life that leads to the Home of God.

And yet He had a special affection for those who were living the righteous life. He had a great joy in them. Their imperfections and sins did not repel Him. Brother of all men,

He was conscious of a nearer kinship to those who had learned to love and serve His Father in heaven. Those He drew to Himself and to each other. He increased their happiness and strength by loving them. He shared their whole life, and wanted them to share His. He liked to have them with Him in His work. He looked to them for support in His sufferings. '*Whither I go, ye know the way.*' That is the life that leads to the Home of God.

Now Christ knows, as we cannot know, what the Home of God is; and He also knows what is the way to it. He points us to Himself as illustrating the way. '*Whither I go, ye know the way.*' We must not suppose that in these words He meant to say exactly the same thing as when, in reply to Thomas's objection,

He said—'*I am the way.*' That is a further discovery; it includes something beyond what He says here. For the present He is content with reminding the disciples that since they knew His way of life, they knew the way of life that led to the blessedness and the glory to which He was going. And observe, He does not say that this was one of the ways to the Home of God. It was the only way. The way for Him was the way for them. It is also the way for us. In its outward form your life and mine must be very different from His, but in the inward spirit and law of your life and mine we must repeat the life that He lived, must travel the way that He travelled, or we cannot reach the end that He reached.

The great promise of immortality must, from the very

nature of the case, include the promise of the strength to fulfil the moral and spiritual conditions on which immortality depends. If there is to be glory in the life to come, there must be the beginning of it in the life that now is. The moral and spiritual direction which our life is now taking necessarily determines the end that we shall reach when life is over. We know where a man is going by the road he takes. The road along which Christ travelled is the only road to the great life which Christ is now living and which all saintly souls are to share with Him. And from the life He lived on earth we may infer the kind of life that He is living now. Where could He be going but to the Home of God? Knowing the way, we know the end of it. And for us the great question is

whether our own life is so like the life of Christ as to be certain to bring us where Christ's life brought Him. The Christian Gospel, the Christian faith, is supremely a question of life, and all that it reveals of truth has the closest and most intimate relations to life. Promise blends with precept, and doctrines reveal at once ideals of righteousness and the source from whence the strength for achieving righteousness may come.

Now I need say nothing to those who are habitually guilty of open or of secret crimes; who are consciously violating moral law, which is the law of God; whose unchecked tendency and disposition is antagonistic to the Divine righteousness and purity and love. Their way of life must plainly lead to eternal destruction. About this there can be no mis-

take. They themselves know it. As Paul says, 'They treasure up for themselves wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.'[1] God is not a good-natured Being with infinite love merely; He is infinitely strong, and is ever on the side of righteousness. The continuity of life in this world and in the next includes all those who do not now believe, and it quenches all hope. 'God will render to every man according to his deeds.' The impenitent wickedness of which a man is consciously guilty can lead to nothing but damnation.

But let those who are free from grave offences ask themselves whether their way of life is leading them to the Home of God. Suppose now that a man's spirit and habits of life make it an in-

[1] Romans ii. 5.

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life from which God is thus excluded,—can it be the way to the Home of God?

Suppose that a man's spirit and habits of life, his tastes, his preferences, separate him very much from those who love Christ and are trying to serve Him; that though he thinks he has a certain measure of affection and reverence for Christ Himself, he does not find as a matter of experience that the Christian faith of other men is so strong a bond of union with them as common intellectual tastes, social sympathies, public interests; suppose that by an habitual choice, which reveals the inner tendency of his life, he prefers associating with those who show no loyalty to Christ and no delight in His service;—is this the life that looks like the way to the Home of God, where only those who love God are to dwell?

Suppose that a man thinks and cares altogether about himself,—is constantly expecting to receive either freely or by purchase, service from other men,—makes no serious attempt to serve them, except as he is compelled to do it in order to serve himself; suppose that in his thoughts of God, his one thought is about what God will do for him, and that he never thinks what he can do for God; suppose that his very religion is concentrated and exhausted in his personal salvation; —is this the life which looks like the way to the Home of God, where every heart will be full of love and care for others, and every man will find his blessedness in the glory of God and the glory of his brethren?

There is something infinitely pathetic in the tranquil complacency with which men seem to

assume that a life separated from God in this world may be the way to eternal joy in Him in the next; that a life separated from those who love God in this world may be the way to eternal association with them in the world to come. It cannot be. The infinite grace of God revealed through Christ does not reverse all the laws of our moral and spiritual life. There is truth—though only a partial truth—in the old saying that every man makes his own heaven and his own hell. He excludes God from his present life—and God is excluded from it. He cares supremely for present pleasure, ease, wealth, honour, and even in his duties he refuses to recognise the laws of the invisible and eternal world. He elects that his treasure shall be on earth; and when he passes from earth the treasure is all lost.

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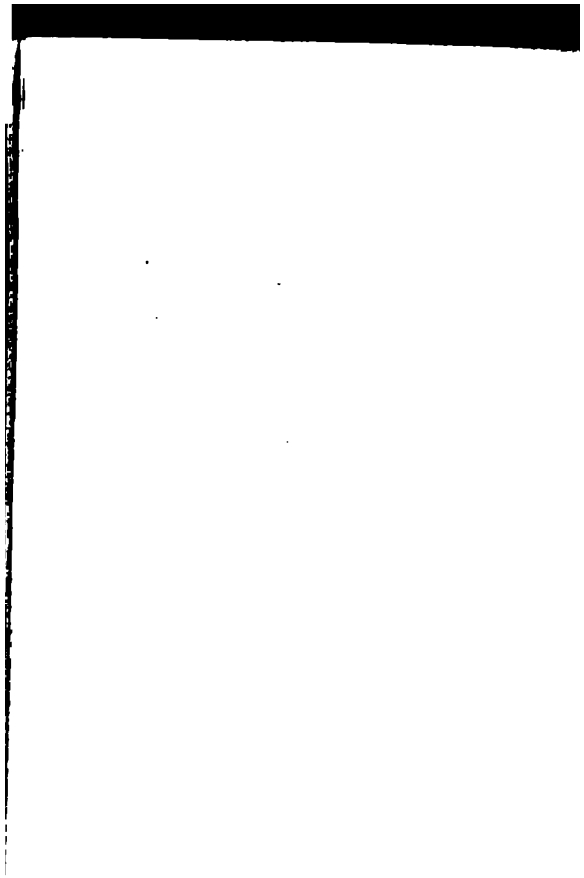
physical and moral infirmities may often disturb and distract their worship, the infirmities will disappear, and the true law of their life will be fulfilled in that unbroken communion with the Divine love and righteousness which will be the chief blessedness of our Father's Home. They are vividly conscious of kinship with all who love Christ; and if they are separated by their own fault from any Christian man, it saddens them deeply; and if by the fault of others, still it saddens them: their delight is to share the life of those who are in Christ. Clearly they are in the way to the great household in which all the children of God are to be gathered. Their heart is filled with a reverence and with an affection and with a pity no words can utter for all mankind; for every man bears the

image of God, and was created to abide in the Home of God; and knowing how God also must love those created for such a destiny, they are striving according to their strength to restore to God those who have erred and strayed from His way. Those who are trying to bring men home to God must be on their way to God's Home themselves; they are living a life that will bring them at last to God's blessedness.

Many of you say, For me this ideal of life is impossible; I have tried it, and I have failed. Listen to the words of Christ that follow: '*I am the way*,' as well as '*the truth, and the life*.' He Who has illustrated the kind of life that leads to the Home of God, blesses, in the things that He Himself was blessed with, those who trust in Him; and the life which He lives they also live in the

strength and power of Christ. They believe the words of Christ, and so they too with Christ's grace will dwell in His eternal Home.



THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE

THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE

'Thomas saith unto Him, Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; how know we the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by Me.'—JOHN xiv. 5, 6.

'*We know not whither Thou goest*'; and yet Christ had told them. He had just said, 'In My Father's house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you.' Thomas spoke for the rest of the Apostles as well as for himself. They were almost paralysed with grief and terror, and the words of Christ conveyed to them no clear and firm meaning. You and I, now that we can think over our Lord's words quietly, can discover in them

wonderful revelations of that great life into which Christ was about to pass, and to which, as He said, He would bring His disciples; but we need not be surprised that when He spoke of His Father's house to which He was going, Peter and James and John and the other disciples were unable to grasp what He meant. And are there not moral and spiritual conditions through which we all pass, in which we too are unable to see the glory of the very truths which our Lord Jesus Christ has revealed most plainly? Nor are these conditions temporary and transient. I suppose that most of us are conscious that owing to a certain want of devout consideration we miss the meaning of a large part of the revelation of God contained in the life and teaching of Christ. We complain — complain con-

stantly — that the revelation is fragmentary and incomplete; that it leaves many great questions unanswered. Like Thomas, we are continually saying, '*We know not*'; and yet lying on the open page before us are words and deeds of Christ in which what we want to know is revealed. Years pass by during which our perplexity and our uncertainty continue, and then we suddenly discover that, if we had listened to Christ with a freer and more active mind, we might have learned from the beginning the truth which we thought had been hidden from us.

'*We know not whither Thou goest*'—and yet, as I have said, Christ had told them—'*How know we the way?*' That they did not know whither Christ was going was the result of their agitation, which had prevented them from

seeing the meaning of what He had said about His Father's house, and the question rested on a mistake. But they might have known *the way* to the world to which He was going, without knowing anything about the glory and the blessedness of that world. The path along which Christ had travelled was plain, even if, through the awful mystery of death which He was just now touching, no glimpse could be caught of what lay beyond. Since they knew Christ's way of life in this world, they knew the way to the greatness and honour and joy that were to be His in the world to come. As a matter of fact, He had told them that He was going to the Father; but if He had not told them, they might have known the way by which to travel to those unknown regions of life into which

He was about to enter. But Christ does not reproach them. He goes on to speak more plainly: '*I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by Me.*'

I have no hope of being able to unfold the meaning of these amazing words. No one has ever yet unfolded, no one will ever be able to unfold, their meaning. Not because their meaning is obscure or uncertain, but because, like many others of the words of Christ, their meaning can never be exhausted: when we have said everything, everything remains unsaid. In Christ Himself the infinite and eternal glory of God lies within and behind the limitations of human life; and in some of the words of Christ infinite meanings lie within and behind the limitations of human language. Why, these

words are to me more wonderful than all the wonders contained in the Four Gospels. To me Christ's miracles of mercy, His quenching the fires of fever, restoring strength to the paralysed, sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, life to the dead, are less august manifestations of His divinity than the power He had to utter words like these. For those that have eyes for the open vision of God, here is a miracle, a sign, a descent of God into the region of human thought and life, in the presence of which we can but bow with reverence and gratitude and awe.

The words contain an answer —could we only grasp it—to the ultimate questions of philosophy; they solve the deepest problems in ethics; they are the end of all theological speculations; they

disclose the true nature and destiny of man; they contain the innermost secrets of the universe, and reveal its relations to the eternal God. And yet while they reach into these immense and infinite regions of thought, they touch our common life at every point, and are more practical than the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount. I leave you to follow for yourselves—with whatever strength God gives you—the paths that open to the sublimest heights of speculation, and shall be content to speak of the guidance they afford in the conduct of life.

Our Lord said, '*Whither I go, ye know the way.*' He was going to God, and the life He lived was the way to God. But if He had said nothing more than this, His words would have filled the human race with despair. For

through age after age Christ has stood alone, supreme, unapproachable; and if only by living the life Christ lived we can reach the Father, then all hope of reaching the Father is lost. How is it possible for us to approach His transcendent perfection? Saint after saint has attempted the imitation of Christ, but not one of them has ever approached His unique holiness. As we watch one after another rising to height above height of glorious goodness in the attempt to reach Christ, we see that they are like men climbing mountains to reach the stars: Christ remains infinitely above them all. Yes; knowing Christ's life, we know the way to God. But for you and me it is an impossible life; and if in the early Christian ages, before the experiment had been tried, it might have seemed worth

while to try to live that life over again, the experience of eighteen centuries must have convinced us that such holiness is 'too wonderful for us; it is high, we cannot attain unto it.' Never once, in all these centuries, has any saint been able to achieve His sinless perfection; never once has any human heart been filled with the same perfect love and sympathy for man, the same perfect faith and joy in God.

But now our Lord adds a declaration which relieves solicitude and restores hope: '*I,—I am the way.*' In and through Christ, man may find God in this world and in the next. Can there be anything more practical than that? Is not this the supreme truth for every one of us? What is there comparable to it in relation to the security and blessedness of human life, or in relation

to conduct? To find God—is not this an infinitely greater thing than for the sick to find health, for the weak to find strength, for the poor to find riches beyond all that they have dared to hope for? To find God—is not this an infinitely greater thing than to achieve fame, to win power, to succeed in all the most daring enterprises of the loftiest ambition? To find God—is not this an infinitely greater thing than to master all the old sciences and to create new ones? To find God—is not this an infinitely greater thing than to discover the glory of the noblest monuments of human genius, or by one magnificent effort to surpass them all? What is there comparable to it? If you and I can find God, our personal righteousness will rest on eternal foundations; and if we can make clear to others how they can find

God, we show to them the path to perfection and to blessedness.

Christ says, '*I,—I am the way to the Father*'; for He adds, '*No man cometh to the Father, but by Me.*' I will not stay to illustrate the unique grandeur of this declaration. Who is this that stands between the human race and God, and says that no man cometh to the Father but by Him? But I will ask you to try and grasp the truth firmly, for we may easily let it slip. This then must be the secret and aim of Christ; and only as we recognise this can the real nature of the Christian Faith be understood. Christ taught a pure and generous morality. Yes, but others have done that, though not so perfectly. You do not understand the morality of Christ until you understand that He is '*the way to the Father.*' In teaching a lofty mo-

reality Christ was seeking an end that lies beyond our moral perfection, and we cannot achieve moral perfection unless we find God. He revealed to the world the obligations of a universal charity, and taught us that all men are brothers. Yes, but the great thing concerning Him is here,—that He is '*the way to the Father*'; and we never really learn what other men are to us, and what we are to other men, until we find God, and know what we and all men are to Him. Every ethical precept in our Lord's discourses, every miracle of compassion by which He lessened the sufferings of mankind, every gracious, beautiful, and pathetic passage in His personal history, every discovery that He made to us of religious truth, will be misunderstood, will fail to have its true effect in life and thought,

until we see clearly that at the centre of all Christ's activity and teaching there is this great fact,—that He is '*the way to the Father.*' This is the sum and substance of the Christian Gospel.

Christ is '*the way to the Father.*' If any Church or Priest claims to be the only medium and channel of eternal redemption, we deny, we reject, the blasphemous pretension. It is enough that we find God; and not a Church, not a Priest, but Christ is the way to the Father. There lies the heart of our controversy with sacerdotalism. If moralists tell us that by the culture of moral virtue, by charity, by doing our best, we shall be certain of immortal life and blessedness, we answer that the result of moral virtue, of charity, of doing our best, is a question of great interest; every man will receive

from God according to the deeds done in the body, according not to some of them, but all; but not by our personal perfection can we find God. Christ, not our personal righteousness, is the way to the Father. '*No man cometh to the Father, but by Me.*' There lies the heart of our controversy with what is sometimes called Natural Religion. Christ, the Eternal Son of God; Christ, the Son of man; Christ Himself, not His example, not His teaching, not His sufferings,—Christ Himself is '*the way to the Father.*'

Christ Himself,—and hence we must become incorporated with Him, must be made one with Him; the roots of our life must be in His life. Then in the power of His trust we shall trust in God, in the clearness of His vision we shall see the glory of God. The spirit of His Sonship will enable

us to call God our Father. When we are conscious that we have sinned, and that our confessions of sin are inadequate and incomplete, we shall remember how He during His earthly life took upon Him the sins of men, and in our name confessed them as we could not confess them for ourselves; in our name, as being one with us, submitted to sorrow and death, and acknowledged how grievous was the guilt our race had incurred. In the power of His righteousness we shall be enabled to live, —if not the life He lived,—yet a life penetrated with the same spirit, governed by the same laws, directed to the same ends. In fellowship with Him we shall be conscious that we have already passed beyond and above the limits of this visible and transitory world, and have already, through the Divine grace and

power, been translated into the Divine Kingdom. Christ being the way to the Father, only by a union with Christ can we find God.

There are very few of us, I imagine, who have not at some time or another tried to find our way to God. He is a God nigh at hand, and we know that He is near. We live and move and have our being in Him. He surrounds us, like the atmosphere and the light of heaven; yet we are conscious that there is a mysterious separation between ourselves and Him. There are moments, I believe, in the history of nearly every man when this separation is felt to be intolerable, and when the heart is filled with an intense longing for a direct and immediate access to God. Nor is it for the mere sake of satisfying a craving for knowledge

that we desire to come face to face with Him. We have an instinctive conviction that if the unseen barriers which separate us from God could only be broken down, we should enter into a freer, nobler, and more perfect life. We feel that there is something wanting to us so long as we are separated from Him; and although we hardly know what it is, we are conscious that if it were ours we should be inspired with a new strength and crowned with a new glory. In the case, I fear, of many men, these vague desires for restoration to God disappear after a few fitful and ineffectual attempts to satisfy them. But the remembrance of them does not perish, and when all serious efforts to find God have been abandoned, there still survives a hope that somehow and some day the great secret will

be revealed. Hence, perhaps, it is that even men who make no claim to religious faith remain so long in the neighbourhood of religious influence, and like to be moved by religious sentiment. Pathetic hymns, the solemnities of worship, noble pictures of Christ and of the saints, stately and venerable religious architecture, the awful solitude of mountains, stir within them emotions which they half hope will carry them across the mysterious line which separates them from God. They listen regularly to preaching; the more intense and earnest it is, the more deeply it stirs their passions, the better they like it. They suppose that from some man it is possible they may some day hear words of such irresistible power that they will be swept, as by a torrent, to the very feet of God, and that at last the strong desires

of their earlier years will be accomplished.

I ask those of you who have had these longings for restoration to God—those of you especially who have them now—to take these words of Christ, and to think of them until their wonderful meaning is revealed to you. I am weary of listening to fervent and rhetorical declamation, perfectly sincere and very beautiful and noble as it often is, on the incidental benefits conferred upon the world by the Christian faith. It is true, no doubt, that by the Christian faith barbarous races have been civilised, and the morality of civilised nations made purer and more robust. It is true that this faith has been the inspiration of great poets and artists, that it has stimulated and exalted the intellectual life of Europe,—and especially is it true

that it has been the spring of a thousand fair and gracious charities, that it has taught men to relieve the poor, to care for the sick, to reclaim the outcast, and to vindicate the rights of the oppressed. It is true that it gives a more august authority to human laws, and is the surest defence of the stability of nations. But the great work which Christ came to do is too often forgotten. The mightiest empires are destined to decay, and all their intellectual glories, all the triumphs of their literature and art, will perish too. The miseries of human life are but imperfectly alleviated by the wisest and most generous charity, or the most just and gracious legislation, and to the end the wretched will find their only secure and lasting rest in the grave. But the restoration of men to God is an immortal work;

it will endure when the heavens and the earth have passed away. And as it is more enduring, it is also infinitely more glorious than any of the benefits which God Himself can confer upon the temporal life of man. To be restored to Him is the crown of all blessings, and it is a crown that fadeth not away.

I appeal to you to be satisfied with nothing less than this. Listen to all that Christ reveals concerning God, and believe it; but appeal to the living Christ, and pray that through Him you may find God for yourselves. Listen to all that Christ teaches concerning human duty, and obey it; but tell Him that you are one of God's lost children, and pray that through Him you may find the Father. Listen to His declaration that He died for the remission of sins: thank Him for it; but tell

Him that since God is now at peace with you, you want to go home to God and to rest in the mercy and the love by which your sins are so graciously forgiven. Listen to His promises of strength, of light, and of peace: believe them; but tell Him that for you there can be no light, no peace, till you have found God, that in God's presence your weakness may be made strong, and that you come to Him as the way to the Father. Listen to His great words concerning the Divine and Eternal life which He gives to those who trust in Him: thank Him for the infinite blessing; but tell Him that you desire the life of God that you may know God, and entreat Him to restore you to the Father. You will not be asking for more than Christ is willing to grant. Through Him God finds all His creatures,—

through Him all His creatures find God, and even for our race, —even for us, who have erred and gone astray, who have violated the central law of our life, and have fallen short of the glory for which we were created,—even for us the testimony of eighteen centuries confirms the truth of His words,—even for us He is the way unto the Father.

THE RESURRECTION

THE RESURRECTION

'And with great power gave the Apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.' —ACTS iv. 33.

THESE words occur in the description of the life of the Christian Church in its earliest days. We are told that the multitude of them that believed were all of one heart and soul: there was perfect unity in the Church, strong brotherly affection, high enthusiasm: not one of them said that aught of the things that he possessed was his own; they had all things in common: their material wealth they held with a light hand; it was at the service of all their Christian brethren

who needed their assistance; '*and with great power gave the Apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.*'

In the early chapters of this book we have a report of several occasions on which the Apostles asserted the Resurrection of Christ in the presence of large numbers of people who had not acknowledged Him as the Son of God and the Saviour of man, and even in the presence of the ecclesiastical rulers of the nation who had put Him to death. But here they are described as giving their witness concerning the Resurrection of Christ to the Church itself, to the multitude of them that believed, and as giving it with great power. Why was it that this witness to the Resurrection of Christ had to be given to the Church itself? I want to

answer that question as clearly as I can, though briefly.

Why was it that this witness of the Resurrection of Christ had to be given to the Church itself? Did the Apostles think of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ simply as the decisive proof of His divine commission,—as a stronger demonstration that He had come from God than any of the miracles that He had wrought during His earthly ministry? And did they insist on the Resurrection merely to deepen and complete the conviction produced by His miraculous works? This is a very common impression concerning the end for which Christ rose from the dead and appeared to His disciples. He had healed the sick by a touch; at a word He had given sight to the man born blind; He had given hearing and speech to the

deaf and dumb; He had also raised the dead. All these wonderful works were regarded as proof that He was a teacher sent from God: but the crowning proof—so it is imagined—was given in His own Resurrection.

No doubt this is true; but if this were all, I do not think that the Resurrection would have had so large a place in the discourses of the Apostles addressed to those who did not need to be convinced that Christ was the Son of God and the Saviour of man, inasmuch as they already believed. Indeed, if Christ had been only a prophet sent from God—a prophet and nothing more,—His own Resurrection would have been unnecessary to demonstrate His authority; that authority had been sufficiently demonstrated by the quality of His teaching and by His supernatural and beneficent

power. Moses was a prophet sent from God: the Jewish nation knew it; it was not necessary that Moses should rise from the dead to prove it. Isaiah was a prophet sent from God: the Jewish nation knew it; it was not necessary that Isaiah should rise from the dead to prove it. And had Christ been an inspired prophet, and nothing more, it would have been enough that after His death His trusted friends should have collected all the fragments of His teaching that they could remember, and have committed them to writing, so enabling His teaching and the pathetic and beautiful story of His life to produce their impression on the moral and spiritual nature of mankind. For observe, the death of a prophet does not destroy the worth and power of what he has revealed concerning God and

concerning the duties and the hopes of man. And if Christ had been only a prophet, His death would have been the natural and the glorious, though tragic, end of His personal mission, and His teaching would have derived fresh sanctity and impressiveness from His martyrdom. But we have only to recall some of the most conspicuous and memorable words of the Lord Jesus to discover that to His disciples His death was for the moment the destruction of all the hopes which He had inspired, and the complete wreck of the great work which He had come to accomplish.

Let me remind you of some of these words, with which, indeed, you must be all familiar. Christ had said, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'[1] Great

[1] Matthew xi. 28.

and wonderful words, — words such as had never been spoken before by any prophet sent from God. 'Come unto Me and I will give you rest.' Now that He was dead, how could men come to Him? Now that He was dead, how could He give men rest? You remember the words spoken to the woman at the well, — a woman of Samaria: 'Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life.'[1] Now that He was dead, how could He confer this transcendent gift? He had said that He was the good Shepherd, the true Shepherd of the flock of God; that He knew His sheep and His sheep knew Him. He had said

[1] John iv. 14.

that He had other sheep not belonging to the Jewish fold; they also, He went on to say, 'shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock, one Shepherd.'[1] But of what avail to the scattered and defenceless flock is a dead shepherd? Listen again to other words of His: 'My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand.'[2] These words clearly carry with them this teaching: not only are men to receive guidance and strength from knowing Christ, they are to receive guidance and strength from Christ knowing them. He was not a prophet merely who had come to reveal great truths to the world, and to leave them

[1] John x. 16. [2] John x. 27, 28.

as a great inheritance for coming generations, that by the knowledge of such truths men might find their way to a better and nobler life. That is not Christ's conception of His relationship to man. The sheep were to find knowledge in Him—'I know them'; and it was this knowledge of His sheep that made Him so perfect, so mighty, so gracious a Shepherd. But if He were dead, whither would that knowledge of the Shepherd pass?

Again, He claimed power to forgive sins. How great a thing it was for sinful men to have among them one Who spoke in the name of God, and Who declared that He could forgive all their sins. Now that He was dead and out of reach, that power—so it would seem—could be exercised no more on behalf of the penitent and troubled.

In short, throughout our Lord's ministry He spoke not merely as one who had come to give men nobler ethical laws, to announce to them a large spiritual freedom, to give them assurances of the Divine righteousness and love, to reveal the Unseen and Eternal universe by which we are environed; had this been all, His death would not have lessened the glory of His revelation. He spoke as one — and this distinguishes Him from all other prophets, from all other great leaders of the religious thought and life,—He spoke as one who had personal authority and power from heaven to defend and to rescue men from all the evils by which human life is darkened and made desolate, to raise them to new heights of righteousness, and to restore them to the light of God.

His death was, therefore, the destruction of all hope. But the Apostles had this great message to deliver to the Church as well as to the world: He was not dead: He had come back from that region of infinite mystery which encompasses this mortal life: the work that He had said He would do was not brought to a close by the catastrophe of the crucifixion. His friends were strong and exulting again,—stronger and more exulting than they had ever been before. They had recovered Christ. He was alive again. Alone of all the prophets who had endured martyrdom, He had returned to the world, had given His friends fresh teaching, fresh promises, fresh powers. He was alive—and alive for evermore. The Church had lost Christ for three days; it had now recovered Him for ever.

The narratives of His appearances after His Resurrection show that it was the very Christ that had been crucified that appeared to His friends; and yet He had passed through a mysterious change. He was the same. Mary Magdalene knew Him; Peter and John and James knew Him; all the Apostles knew Him. The two disciples that saw Him at Emmaus knew Him. The company that saw Him in Galilee, the five hundred brethren that saw Him at one time, knew Him, though some doubted. He was the same, yet not the same. The cave in which His dead body was laid was empty when the women went to it to perform the last sad duties of reverential love. It was He Himself, not an apparition, that the disciples saw. But He had not come back to the common

life of man,—the life that He had lived before. His Resurrection was not like the resurrection of Lazarus,—a return to the infirmities of this earthly condition. In His Resurrection He was the first-fruits of all the dead, the beginning of that great harvest which His own words had predicted. As Paul reminded the Church at Corinth—'That which thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be, but a bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other kind,'[1]—the wheat in the ear is not the wheat which was sown in the ground and which died; but the life of the seed, strengthened by warmth and moisture and by the kindly qualities of the soil, by air, by light, by the heat of the sun, clothes itself with a new body—a body which is the expression and

[1] 1 Corinthians xv. 37.

organ of its own life. God gives it a body, and to each seed its own body. That is the illustration which Paul gives of our own resurrection and of Christ's.

Now in the case of Lazarus, observe, the seed—the very seed which had been sown in the earth —was taken out of the earth again,—the same seed: in the case of Christ the seed which was sown in corruption was raised in incorruption; the seed which was sown in dishonour was raised in glory; the seed which was sown a natural body was raised a spiritual body. And so to those to whom Christ appeared, there was a revelation of that divine life which we hope to inherit when our mortal years are spent. They did not merely receive a fresh proof that He was a prophet sent from God; they saw the beginning of that blessed and

eternal kingdom which Christ has made the inheritance of all that believe in Him. For them the golden gates of the invisible and eternal world were unclosed. When He came, there was mystery in His appearing; there was mystery in His vanishing, when He left them. Problems concerning the relation of the material and the supernatural—problems altogether inaccessible to us—are suggested by these manifestations of the risen Lord. But what the friends of Christ knew was this,—they had not only recovered their Lord; they had recovered Him in a higher and glorified life.

Nor was this all. There is a very striking phrase, as it seems to me, at the close of Luke's Gospel. I will read the last three verses:—

'And He led them out until they were

over against Bethany: and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He parted from them, and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, blessing God.'

'They returned to Jerusalem with great joy.' How was that possible? Had they not lost Christ a second time? No, they felt that the symbolic ascent of His visible form into the skies was no real severance of Christ from His disciples upon earth. That ascent revealed to them that His home was with God; but He had already revealed to them that His home was with them. His visible appearances were to cease,—or at least they were not to be of the same kind as those which had made the forty days since the Resurrection so blessed; but He had been training them during that time to a deep and perfect faith in

His perpetual presence with them. He had promised that perpetual presence before His death, but it is quite clear that the promise had produced no impression; or that if the impression had been produced, it was obliterated by the sorrow and anguish occasioned by His crucifixion. But now they were able to receive it with perfect faith that Christ would always be near to them.

Observe how the appearances of Christ to His disciples during the forty days had prepared them. Mary in her distress had been watching the empty sepulchre; and Christ Himself appeared. Yes; He was there before He appeared, teaching us surely that in our sorrow and utter desolation, if our hearts are true to Christ, we may be sure that Christ is near, though as yet He

may not manifest His presence. There were two disciples who were walking towards Emmaus; they were discussing their irreparable loss, and a stranger joined them; Who it was at first they did not know; and then Christ revealed Himself to them. He was with them before He revealed Himself, and their hearts had begun to burn before they knew from Whose lips the words came that had kindled the fire. In times of doubt, when love clings to Christ, though it may seem as if every reason for clinging to Him has been destroyed—be sure of it—Christ, though He may not manifest Himself to us at once, is near. The Apostles were assembled on the evening of the first Easter Sunday, with closed doors for fear of the Jews: Christ appeared to them: He was there before He appeared.

Had He not said, 'Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them'? That was just as true before they saw Him as it was afterwards, and He appeared in order to carry home the truth to them, which they ought to have held fast apart from His appearing. It is not for us, looking back on them in their anguish, to say that they ought to have believed before He appeared; but the appearance gave impressiveness and conclusive force. And Peter and John, you remember, and some of their friends, were fishing on the Lake of Galilee; they had been fishing all night, and as the dawn came they saw a form on the shore, and John recognised that it was the form of Christ. Christ was there before they knew it. And so in our common work — the

weariest, dreariest, most unsuccessful—when through the night we have been toiling and catching nothing, ought we not to believe that Christ is near? And as Christ in that manner revealed Himself to His disciples, so Christ, though unseen, is near to us. How grateful we ought to be for every appearance, for each assurance, that not merely when we are gathered together for religious worship and for Christian communion, but when we are about our common business, Christ is near and that His presence can sanctify and transfigure all common work.

And so these revelations of the risen Christ are for all time. For ourselves we believe that this presence of Christ through age after age in every land with those that love and trust Him, is a substantial part of the

Christian Gospel. He is not dead as Paul is dead, or Peter, John, Augustine, Luther. They have left behind them words of wisdom and of power which it was given to them to utter, but they are with the Church personally no longer. Christ is personally present with us. 'With great power gave the Apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.' And I have sometimes thought that what we specially need in our time is witness of the same kind and delivered with the kind of power that belonged to it when it came from the lips of the Apostles. I thank God for the labours of all the scholarly men that will establish for me the trustworthiness of the story of Christ's earthly ministry contained in the four Gospels. That historic manifestation of the Eternal is of

immeasurable value; but what we need more than the scholarly demonstration of the trustworthiness of that great story is the prophetic witness of Christ's living presence with the Church. That can come only from that indwelling of the Holy Ghost by which to the spirit of man the power of Christ is gloriously revealed through age after age. Those have most developed the life of the Church, and have spoken with highest authority to its conscience —those have been most successful in drawing the hearts of men outside to Christ, who have not thought merely or mainly of the earthly ministry of Christ, who have not been content with reciting a tradition, but who have been able of their own personal knowledge concerning the righteousness and the power of the living and glorified Christ to bear witness concerning Him.

We meet for worship, not in order to commemorate a great religious teacher, a prophet sent from God, who spoke to men in a remote land and in a remote age. Our churches are not monuments of a vanished Christ. We meet because we believe that 'where two or three are gathered together in His name,' Christ Himself is among us. By whatever ritual a building erected for Christian worship is set apart, no sanctity can ever attach to the material structure; the real consecration belongs to the people who gather within the building. Christ has never promised to dwell in any building we may erect for Him. Never! What Christ has declared is this,—that where we ourselves are gathered together in His name, there He Himself is among us. To living men, not to dead stones, whatever rites are

celebrated there—to companies of living men gathered together in the name of Christ, the presence of Christ is assured.

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